

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1 - 11 [Canceled]

12. [Currently Amended] A method of forming a hidden, integral passenger air bag door in an instrument panel cover, the method comprising:

forming the instrument panel cover having an inner surface and an opposing outer surface defining a single uniform layer, using a female vacuum forming tool exposing the inner surface,

elevating a temperature of the female vacuum forming tool high enough to form the outer surface against the female vacuum forming tool, and

forming a deployment region in the inner surface of the instrument panel cover by contacting only the inner surface with at least one scoring device after initiation of the formation of the instrument panel cover creating at least one score therein at or near the elevated temperature from the female vacuum forming tool when said at least one scoring device contacts the instrument panel cover, but prior to the cooling thereof, the at least one score defining the deployment region and providing a weakened tear pattern in the inner surface so that deployment of an air bag cushion causes the deployment region to open along the at least one score for deployment of the air bag cushion.

13. [Previously Presented] The method as set forth in claim 12, wherein forming the deployment region comprises:

providing at least one scoring member which is extendable and retractable upon actuation of the device;

contacting the at least one scoring member with the instrument panel cover at only the inner surface thereof during the formation of the instrument panel cover; and

forming the at least one score by advancing the at least one scoring member into the instrument panel cover from the inner surface thereof, the advancement of the at least one scoring member causing the instrument panel cover to thin out in predetermined locations which define the at least one score.

14. [Cancelled]

15. [Original] The method as set forth in claim 13, wherein the instrument panel cover is formed of a synthetic material.

16. [Original] The method as set forth in claim 13, wherein the deployment region has a shape selected from the group consisting of U-shaped, II-shaped, V-shaped, C-shaped, Y-shaped and I-shaped.

17. [Original] The method as set forth in claim 13, wherein the at least one scoring member is disposed upon a cylinder which is actuated by an adjustment system for maneuvering the at least one scoring member relative the instrument panel cover.

18. [Original] The method as set forth in claim 17, wherein the adjustment system is pneumatic and is controlled by an operator.

Claims 19 - 22 . [Cancelled]

23. [Previously Presented] The method as in claim 12, wherein the weakened tear pattern of the instrument panel cover is configured to separate under pressure generated by an inflating air bag cushion which is positioned proximate the inner surface of the instrument panel cover.

24. [Previously Presented] The method as in claim 12, wherein the instrument panel cover is formed of a synthetic material.

25. [Previously Presented] The method as in claim 12, wherein the instrument panel cover is formed of a thermoplastic material selected from the group consisting of a polyethylene based polyolefin elastomer and a polypropylene based thermoplastic elastomer.

26. [Previously Presented] The method as in claim 12, wherein the at least one scoring device contacts the instrument panel cover prior to the setting of the instrument panel cover to form the at least one score therein.

27. [Previously Presented] The method as in claim 26, wherein the temperature of the instrument panel cover is elevated to a temperature higher than the temperature of the formed instrument panel cover and the instrument panel cover is at or near the elevated temperature when said at least one scoring device contacts the instrument panel cover.

28. [Previously Presented] The method as in claim 12, wherein the at least one score is formed by advancing a contact edge of the at least one scoring device into the inner surface of the instrument panel cover a predetermined distance toward the outer surface, the instrument panel cover being disposed in a mold device.

29. [Previously Presented] The method as in claim 28, wherein the mold device comprises a female vacuum forming tool.

30. [Previously Presented] The method as in claim 28, wherein the predetermined distance of the at least one score is controlled by limiting the advancement of the at least one scoring device into the instrument panel cover at the inner surface.

31. [Previously Presented] The method as in claim 28, wherein the at least one scoring device comprises a scoring blade which forms apart of a moveable cylinder, the at least one scoring blade being extendable and retractable relative to the cylinder, the cylinder and at least one scoring blade being orientated above the body so that upon actuation thereof, the cylinder and at least one scoring blade are lowered to contact the body and form the at least one score.

32. [Currently Amended] The method as in claim 31, wherein the at least one scoring blade contacts the instrument panel cover to form the at least one score when the instrument panel cover is at a temperature wherein at least a portion of the inner surface of said instrument panel cover is deformable.

33. [Canceled]

Claim 34. [Currently Amended] A method for forming a hidden, integral passenger air bag door in a portion of an instrument panel cover, comprising:

applying a quantity of thermoplastic material to a female vacuum forming tool exposing an inner surface of the instrument panel;

elevating a temperature of the female vacuum forming tool high enough to form an exterior surface opposite the inner surface against the female vacuum forming tool;

vacuum forming the instrument panel cover having ~~an~~ the exposed inner surface and ~~then~~ opposing exterior surface defining a single uniform layer; and

forming a deployment region in the inner surface of the instrument panel cover by contacting only the inner surface with at least one scoring device after initiation of the vacuum formation of the instrument panel cover creating at least one score therein at or near the elevated temperature from the female vacuum forming tool when said at least one scoring device contacts the instrument panel cover, the at least one score defining the deployment region and providing a weakened tear pattern in the inner surface wherein the deployment of an air bag cushion causes the deployment region of the instrument panel cover to tear open along at the at least one score for deployment of the air bag cushion, the deployment region being formed after or during the vacuum forming of the instrument panel, but prior to the cooling thereof.

Claim 35. [Previously Presented] The method as in Claim 33, wherein the deployment region is formed after the vacuum forming of the instrument panel but prior to the cooling of the instrument panel cover.

Claim 36. [Previously Presented] The method as in Claim 33, further comprising:

applying a foam layer to said inner surface after the forming of the instrument panel cover and the deployment region; and

applying a substrate layer to said foam layer, said substrate layer having a plurality of scores aligning with the deployment region.

37. [Previously Presented] The method as in Claim 36, wherein said substrate layer is formed by an injection molding process.

38. [Previously Presented] The method as in Claim 33, wherein a portion of the scoring device is heated prior to the scoring of the inner surface.